

ABSTRACT

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5 A method and apparatus to implement and operate a network of automated collection points is described. The automated collection points facilitate the delivery of goods to a customer. The invention allows customers, delivery agents, or retailers to arrange for the delivery of goods ordered from a retailer to an automated collection point which can be accessed by a customer. The automated collection point may include different type of interfaces, such as barcode readers, smart card readers, biometric scanners, or keypads. The automated collection point is connected via a network medium to a collection of one or more servers referred to as a Locker Management System. A Locker Management System may control two or more automated collection points. These automated collection points may be located at separate geographical locations. When a package is delivered to an ACP site, it is identified to an interface on the ACP by its package ID. In embodiments, the package ID may be embedded in the ACP site address on the ship-to label on the package. In embodiments, the package ID may be encoded as a bar code on a label on the package—this bar code may be scanned on a bar code scanning interface coupled to the automated collection point. In other embodiments, the package ID may be transmitted wirelessly to a detector coupled to the automated collection point. In yet another embodiment, the package ID may be typed into a keyboard in communication with the automated collection point. Upon validating the package ID, the automated collection point will open to permit access, so that the package may be placed into an appropriately-sized secure locker. In embodiments of the invention, upon receipt of the package by the automated collection point, the customer will automatically be sent a message containing notification of the delivery. The message may include a numeric code for opening the locker.